

A GOOD BARGAIN

By Lord Dunsany

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A Good Bargain

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A NIGHT IN AN INN

THE TENTS OF THE ARABS

THE QUEEN'S ENEMIES

IF

A Good Bargain

By
Lord Dunsany

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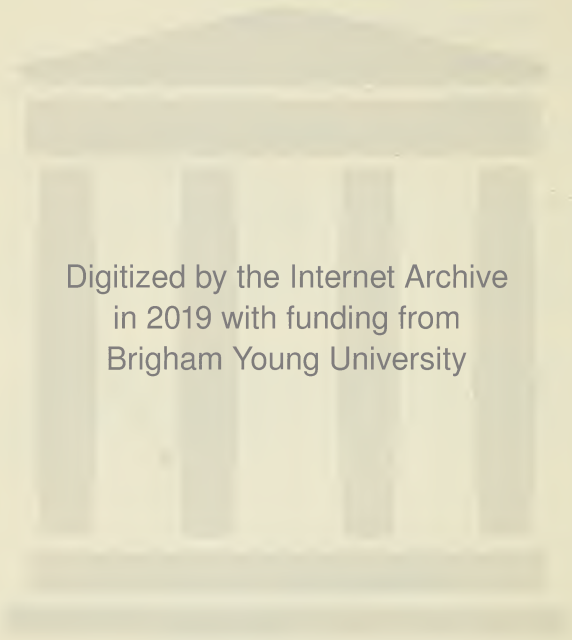
BROTHER ANTONINUS.

BROTHER LUCULLUS SEVERUS.

BROTHER GREGORIUS PEDRO.

SATAN.

SMOGGS.



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Scene: A Crypt of a Monastery. BROTHER GREGORIUS PEDRO is seated on a stone bench reading. Behind him is a window.

Enter BROTHER LUCULLUS SEVERUS.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: Brother, we may doubt no longer.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: Well?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: It is certain. Certain.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: I too had thought so.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: It is clear now, clear as . . . It is certain.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: Well, why not? After all, why not?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: You mean . . . ?

GREGORIUS PEDRO: 'Tis but a miracle.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: Yes, but . . .

GREGORIUS PEDRO: But you did not think to see one?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: No, no, not that; but Brother Antoninus . . .

GREGORIUS PEDRO: Well, why not he? He is holy as any, fasts as often as any, wears coarser clothing than most of us, and once scourged a woman because she looked at

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our youngest—scourged her right willingly.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Yet, Brother Antoninus !

GREGORIUS PEDRO : Yet, why not ?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : We knew him, somehow. One does not know the blessed saints of heaven.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : No, no indeed. I never thought to see such a thing on earth ; and now, now . . . you say it is certain ?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Certain.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : Ah, well. It seemed like it, it seemed like it for some days. At first I thought I had looked too long through our eastern window, I thought it was the sun that had dazzled my eyes ; and then, then it was clearly something else.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : It is certain now.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : Ah, well.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS (*sitting beside him, sighs*) : I grudge him nothing.

GREGORIUS PEDRO (*a little heavily*) : No, nor I.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : You are sad, brother.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : No, not sad.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Ah, but I see it.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : Ah, well.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : What grieves you, brother ?

GREGORIUS PEDRO : (*Sighs*) We shall water the

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roses no more, he and I. We shall roll the lawns no more. We shall tend the young tulips together never again.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Oh, why not ? Why not ? There is not all that difference.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : There is.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : It is our cross, brother. We must bear it.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : Ah, yes. Yes, yes.

[*A bell rings noisily.*

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : The gate bell, brother ! Be of good cheer, it is the gate bell ringing !

GREGORIUS PEDRO : Why should I be of good cheer because the gate bell rings ?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Why, brother, the world is at the gate. We shall see someone. It is an event. Someone will come and speak of the great world. Oh, be of good cheer, be of good cheer, brother.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : I think that I am heavy at heart to-day.

[*Enter JOHN SMOGGS.*

SMOGGS : Ullo, Governor. Is either o' yer the chief monk ?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : The Reverend Abbot is not here.

SMOGGS : 'Ain't, ain't 'e ?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : But what do you seek, friend ?

SMOGGS : Want to know what you blokes are getting up to.

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LUCULLUS SEVERUS : We do not understand your angry zeal.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : Tell us, friend.

SMOGGS : One o' yer is playing games no end, and we won't 'ave it.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : Games ?

SMOGGS : Well, miracles if you like it better, and we won't 'ave it, nor any of your 'igh church games nor devices.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : What does he say, brother ?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Friend, you perplex us. We hoped you would speak to us of the great world, its gauds, its wickedness, its——

SMOGGS : We won't 'ave it. We won't 'ave none of it, that's all.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Tell us, friend, tell us what you mean. Then we will do whatever you ask. And then you shall speak to us of the world.

SMOGGS : There 'e is, there 'e is, the blighter. There 'e is. 'E's coming. O Lord . . . !

[He turns and runs. Exit.]

GREGORIUS PEDRO : It's Antoninus !

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Why, yes ; yes, of course !

GREGORIUS PEDRO : He must have seen him over the garden wall.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : We must hush it up.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : Hush it up ?

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LUCULLUS SEVERUS : There must be no scandal in the monastery.

[Enter BROTHER ANTONINUS wearing a halo. He walks across and exits.

[GREGORIUS is gazing with wide eyes.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : There must be no scandal in the monastery.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : It has grown indeed !

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Yes, it has grown since yesterday.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : I noticed it dimly just three days ago. I noticed it dimly. But I did not—— I could not guess . . . I never dreamed that it would come to this.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Yes, it has grown for three days.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : It was just a dim light over his head, but now . . . !

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : It flamed up last night.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : There is no mistaking it now.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : There must be *no scandal*.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : No scandal, brother ?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Look how unusual it is. People will talk. You heard what that man said. They will all talk.

GREGORIUS PEDRO (*sadly*) : Ah, well.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : How could we face it.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : It is, yes, yes,—it is unusual.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Nothing like it has happened for many centuries.

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GREGORIUS PEDRO (*sadly*): No, no. I suppose not.
Poor Antoninus.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: Why could he not have waited?

GREGORIUS PEDRO: Waited? What? Three—
three hundred years?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: Or even five or ten. He is
long past sixty.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: Yes, yes, it would have been
better.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: You saw how ashamed he was.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: Poor Antoninus. Yes, yes.
Brother, I think if we had not been here
he would have come and sat on this
bench.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: I think he would. But he was
ashamed to come, looking, looking like
that.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: Brother, let us go. It is the
hour at which he loves to come and sit
here, and read in the Little Book of
Lesser Devices. Let us go so that he
may come here and be alone.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: As you will, brother; we must
help him when we can.

[*They rise and go.*]

GREGORIUS PEDRO: Poor Antoninus.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS (*glancing*): I think he will come
back now.

[*Exeunt. The bare, sandaled foot of
ANTONINUS appears as the last heel
lifts in the other doorway.*]

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[Enter ANTONINUS rather timidly. He goes to bench and sits. He sighs. He shakes his head to loosen the halo, but in vain. He sighs. Then he opens his book and reads in silence. Silence gives way to mumbles, mumbles to words.)

ANTONINUS : . . . and finally beat down Satan under our feet.

[Enter SATAN. He has the horns and long hair and beard of a he-goat. His face and voice are such as could have been once in heaven.

ANTONINUS (standing, lifting arm) : In the name of . . .

SATAN : Banish me not.

ANTONINUS : In the name . . .

SATAN : Say nothing you may regret, until I have spoken.

ANTONINUS : In the . . .

SATAN : Hear me.

ANTONINUS : Well ?

SATAN : There fell with me from heaven a rare, rare spirit, the light of whose limbs far outshone dawn and evening.

ANTONINUS : Well ?

SATAN : We dwell in darkness.

ANTONINUS : What is that to me ?

SATAN : For that rare spirit I would have the gaud

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you wear, that emblem, that bright ornament. In return I offer you——

ANTONINUS : Begone——

SATAN : I offer you——

ANTONINUS : Begone.

SATAN : I offer you—Youth.

ANTONINUS : I will not traffic with you in damnation.

SATAN : I do not ask your soul, *only that shining gaud.*

ANTONINUS : Such things are not for hell.

SATAN : I offer you Youth.

ANTONINUS : I do not need it. Life is a penance and ordained as a tribulation. I have come through by striving. Why should I care to strive again ?

SATAN (*smiles*) : Why ?

ANTONINUS : Why should I ?

SATAN (*laughs, looking through window*) : It's spring, brother, is it not ?

ANTONINUS : A time for meditation.

SATAN (*laughs*) : There are girls coming over the hills, brother. Through the green leaves and the May.

[ANTONINUS *draws his scourge from his robe.*

ANTONINUS : Up ! Let me scourge them from our holy place.

SATAN : Wait, brother, they are far off yet. But you would not scourge them, you would

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not scourge them, they are so . . . Ah !
one has torn her dress !

ANTONINUS : Ah, let me scourge her !

SATAN : No, no, brother. See, I can see her ankle
through the rent. You would not scourge
her. Your great scourge would break
that little ankle.

ANTONINUS : I will have my scourge ready, if she
comes near our holy place.

SATAN : She is with her comrades. They are
maying. Seven girls. (ANTONINUS *grips*
his scourge.) Her arms are full of may.

ANTONINUS : Speak not of such things. Speak not,
I say.

[SATAN *is leaning leisurely against the*
wall, smiling through the window.

SATAN : How the leaves are shining. Now she is
seated on the grass. They have gathered
small flowers, Antoninus, and put them
in her hair, a row of primroses.

ANTONINUS (*his eyes go for a moment on to far, far*
places. Unintentionally) : What colour ?

SATAN : Black.

ANTONINUS : No, no, no ! I did not mean her hair.
No, no. I meant the flowers.

SATAN : Yellow, Antoninus.

ANTONINUS (*flurried*) : Ah, of course, yes, yes.

SATAN : Sixteen and seventeen and fifteen, and
another of sixteen. All young girls.

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The age for you, Antoninus, if I make you twenty. Just the age for you.

ANTONINUS: You—you cannot.

SATAN: All things are possible unto me except salvation.

ANTONINUS: How?

SATAN: Give me your gaud. Then meet me at any hour between star-shining and cock-crow under the big cherry tree, when the moon is waning.

ANTONINUS: Never.

SATAN: Ah, Spring, Spring. They are dancing. Such nimble ankles.

[ANTONINUS *raises his scourge.*

SATAN (*more gravely*): Think, Antoninus, forty or fifty more Springs.

ANTONINUS: Never, never, never.

SATAN: And no more striving next time. See Antoninus, see them as they dance, there with the may behind them under the hill.

ANTONINUS: Never! I will not look.

SATAN: Ah, look at them, Antoninus. Their sweet figures. And the warm wind blowing in Spring.

ANTONINUS: Never! My scourge is for such.

[SATAN *sighs. The girls laugh from the hill. ANTONINUS hears the laughter.*

A look of fear comes over him.

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ANTONINUS: Which . . . (*a little peal of girlish laughter off*). Which cherry tree did you speak of?

SATAN: This one over the window.

ANTONINUS (*with an effort*): It shall be held accursed. I will warn the brethren. It shall be cut down and hewn asunder and they shall burn it utterly.

SATAN (*rather sorrowfully*): Ah, Antoninus.

ANTONINUS: You shall not tempt a monk of our blessed order.

SATAN: They are coming this way, Antoninus.

ANTONINUS: What! What!

SATAN: Have your scourge ready, Antoninus.

ANTONINUS: Perhaps, perhaps they have not merited extreme chastisement.

SATAN: They have made a garland of may, a long white garland drooped from their little hands. Ah, if you were young, Antoninus.

ANTONINUS: Tempt me not, Satan. I say, tempt me not!

[*The girls sing, SATAN smiles, the girls sing on. ANTONINUS tip-toes to seat, back to window, and sits listening. The girls sing on. They pass the window and shake the branch of a cherry tree. The petals fall in sheets past the window. The girls sing on and ANTONINUS sits listening.*]

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ANTONINUS (*hand to forehead*): My head aches. I think it is that song. . . . Perhaps, perhaps it is the halo. Too heavy, too heavy for *us*.

[SATAN *walks gently up and removes it and walks away with the gold disc.*
ANTONINUS *sits silent.*

SATAN: When the moon is waning.

[*Exit. More petals fall past the window. The song rings on.* ANTONINUS *sits quite still, on his face a new ecstasy.*

CURTAIN



